

One Woman's War: Letters Home From the Women's Army Corps, 1944-1946

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present in San Francisco when the United Nations Conference opened in April 1945. He was present in the White House on a state occasion in 1964 when Luci Baines Johnson danced the Frug and her father tried (unsuccessfully in Petersen's instance) to line up support for his Vietnam policy.

Iowans may be interested in the manner in which a Dane kept alive his optimism for a cooperative commonwealth while being Americanized in Minnesota. Political institutions and ideologies took different forms in Minnesota than in Iowa during the first half of this century. Was this, in part, because of a stronger persistence of ethnicity in Minnesota? Were it not for Keillor's thesis, there would be few compelling reasons for Iowans to read this book. Keillor argues interestingly and convincingly that Petersen played the role of the provincial in politics—one whose independence seldom allowed him to transcend his provinciality.

The Minnesota Historical Society should be congratulated for producing an attractive, readable, durable book on acid-free paper.

One Woman's War: Letters Home from the Women's Army Corps, 1944–1946, by Anne Bosanko Green. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989. xxiv, 308 pp. Illustrations. \$22.50 cloth.

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Despite its title, the interest of *One Woman's War* lies not in any light it sheds on the experience of women in the army in 1944–1946. Rather, it is the particular tale of Anne Bosanko when she was twenty and twenty-one, the years in which she lived in six cities, held two jobs, and dated perhaps a hundred soldiers. She also wrote long candid letters to her parents about twice a week which are collected in this volume. D'Ann Campbell adds a good introductory essay about women in the armed services during World War II.

Bosanko's two-year stint in the Women's Army Corps began at Fort Des Moines in basic training. Only there and at El Paso, where she learned to assist with surgeries, did she focus in her letters on the new vocabularies and routines of military life. After a stay in New Orleans, she moved on to her longest assignment, near Los Angeles, where she complains, "Out here, nobody seems to be normal. . . . they all look half-dead" (158). Nevertheless, perhaps in reaction to her workday, which is filled with amputations and "gore," her social life took off at the end of her first year. We read in subsequent letters throughout two more assignments in New York City and Takoma, Washington, of a long free-wheeling party. Following V-J Day her

workload diminished, her morale declined, and her social pace quickened even more. She writes of a few days in Los Angeles, "Here Schenley's flowed like water. People streamed over, and we danced and sang dirty songs and had a big party. The hell of it was that Harry started proposing. . . . Sunday night: Terry and I went out to dinner and *he* proposed" (231-32).

The young Anne Bosanko is ebulliently extroverted; she jokes, tells stories, and drinks far into most nights, then puts it all down on paper with the same high spirits, to entertain and stay in close touch with her parents. She is affectionate and lively but not reflective. The world events of these two years go virtually unmentioned, except by her parents, in excerpts the author includes from their letters.

Anne's father, Paul Bosanko, is the most compelling correspondent in the book. He remarks on dozens of homefront changes wrought by the war (he especially longed for meat), and he reacts to the war news: "I don't like these new bombs—we are worse than the Nazis" (177). His letters are witty and supportive. Trained as both a lawyer and an Episcopal priest, he ended up teaching French for twenty years at a Minneapolis prep school. In 1946 he resigned to embark on an exciting new career change for him: he bought a dairy farm and prepared to move his family there. Suddenly he dropped dead, at age fifty-five. The reader is shocked: the father seems the mainstay of the whole family of four, despite the angle of vision that presents the daily details of only his oldest child, Anne. It seems related to her father's death that Anne decides to marry, immediately after her discharge, a local man she met when home for her father's funeral.

The letters reveal a young woman with a strong connectedness to people; she eventually chose a career as a school psychologist. She is inconclusive about the role her years in the WAC played in her life: she doesn't "regret" her time in the WAC since "everything makes *some* difference" (308), but she doesn't express this difference. One wishes for more interpretation, either about her own life, about the mid-1940s, or about women in the army. The letters remain as original documents, from which social history or psychological insight might be drawn by others. By themselves they do reveal a great deal about a particular young woman at a moment in her life, and they make an argument for saving one's correspondence. The greatest value of the collection is the vivid and affecting impression upon the reader of the perishability of our days.

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